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Through an Applied Visual Art Lens: Mapping the Arctic through Art and Design-based Actions of Place Mapping and a Multisensory Approach

Katri Sofia Konttinen

Place is an intriguing concept. It is often at the core of applied visual art actions, which can be related, for example, to environmental and community arts and design. Applied visual art can also support sustainable development by increasing the awareness of environments (Huhmarniemi, 2012). At the core of this is collaboration and communication between people and the environments. The Arctic spreads geographically across eight northern countries including Finland. The Arctic is researched and discussed from various perspectives in arts and design in northern Finland. The Lapland University Consortium (LUC) has been profiled as a leader in Arctic research and competence focusing on global Arctic responsibility, sustainable tourism, future services and reachability. Arctic art and design intertwine in studies at the University of Lapland. Rovaniemi is well known for Arctic design and different events such as Arctic Design Week (Rytilahti, 2020). However, there is need for better discussion about the Arctic. This chapter approaches this discussion by observing how art and design-based actions with a place-specific approach could contribute to the discussion of increasing awareness and knowledge on the Arctic. What could be achieved through methods that aim towards deepening our understanding of places and environments? The chapter observes the topic through art and design-based actions, which have taken place between 2012-2020. The examples present actions combined through utilizing a place-specific and multisensory approach to environments with methods rising from community art, environmental art, and design – all these meeting under the label of applied visual arts and aim for creating connections and enabling dialogue towards increasing knowledge and awareness of places.

Introduction

The Arctic is a wide and multidimensional area with approximately four million people living within eight countries. It is characterized by rough, yet beautiful nature with changing seasons and fauna adapted to the cold climate and short summers that bursts with light (Arctic Centre, n.d.).

The Arctic is about people, cultures, places and environments. Personally, and professionally, it has given me the opportunity to plan, organize and facilitate applied visual art workshops in the North within ten years of living in Rovaniemi. Applied visual art can be seen as a field where art and design come together. Collaboration between art and design methods opens spaces for creativity and our senses to the environments. This chapter was born from curiosity towards art and design-based actions and will to observe how these could be utilized in the future in promoting discussion about places and areas such as the Arctic.

I first came into contact with the concepts of place and the Arctic as part of my master studies in applied visual arts, a piloting master's degree programme at the University of Lapland (2011-2014). I found the concepts of place and the Arctic, in relation to art-based activities, fascinating and wished to dive deeper. During my studies, place was approached through the concepts of art and design, where I saw the possibility for the two fields coming together under the label of applied visual arts. This field with wide characters from both art and design provided different tools to approach places and environments through practical working. From the point of view of art and design, the Arctic is simultaneously challenging and full of interesting possibilities to work with different methods (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Art-based performances in the North. Glen Coutts 2012, Katri Kontinen 2012 and 2014.

University of Lapland is part of the Lapland University Consortium (LUC), together with Lapland University of Applied Sciences. The consortium has been profiled as a leader in the area of Arctic research and competence focusing on global Arctic responsibility, sustainable tourism, future services and reachability (University of Lapland, n.d.). University of Lapland is also coordinating the international Arctic Sustainable Art and Design thematic network with 26 circumpolar universities and design education institutes from eight circumpolar countries (Jokela & Coutts, 2014). In the Faculty of Art and Design, art and design are intertwined. Various materials, such as snow, ice, willow, and other nature related materials are widely used in arts and design studies and the specific features of the North and the Arctic are discussed in research done within the fields (e.g. Rytilahti, 2020).

With annually changing themes, the world's northernmost forum of design and town festival, the Arctic Design Week held in Rovaniemi, promotes northern design, students, scientists and artists enlivening town culture with local characteristics (Rytilahti, 2020; Arctic Design Week, n.d.). Arctic Arts Summit is an annually held summit and conference, and its main objective is to strengthen the arts and culture in the North and underline the role of circumpolar cooperation. The Artist's Association of Lapland works towards promoting working opportunities for local artists. The University of Lapland also has gallery spaces, where the art works from students and the staff are presented.

The Arctic, with its special features and variety of cultures and people, is not easily explained or explored. As the Arctic is approached in various ways in the fields of art and design, better discussion is still needed. Through this chapter, I observe how art and design-based actions, under the label of applied visual arts, could contribute to this discussion of increasing awareness and knowledge on the Arctic through a place-specific approach. What could be achieved through methods that aim towards deepening and widening our understanding of places and, therefore, Arctic environments? Different case examples of art and design-based activities, taking place

between 2012-2020, are presented in the chapter, where my affiliation has been the role of a facilitator.

Applied visual art in the North

According to Huhmarniemi (2012), applied visual art means *contemporary art*, which is based on the needs of society or economy life. At the core of applied visual art is collaboration and communication over different boundaries and disciplines. Applied visual art can be seen as an overall network with multiple possibilities to create cross-disciplinary collaboration. It can bring people from different disciplines and backgrounds working together, combining various methods and perspectives in its actions (Figure 2), and encourage people to engage in mutual learning and relearning from each other (e.g., Leavy, 2018).



Figure 2. During the workshops, participants shared different ways to utilise materials, for example, making rope out of willow bark (Anna-Mari Nukarinen, 2012).

The importance of intuitive tacit knowledge is often at the core of working and doing research in natural settings, and in this case, the Arctic. Knowledge is often gained through practice-based methodologies, where the criteria for evaluating research is related to questions and context, and the outcomes are interpreted as particular to the situation (Gray & Malins, 2004). Working within art and design-based activities that combine different materials can support and create dialogue through practical working between people who do not share the same spoken language. Therefore, visual methods can work as a universal language and can connect people sharing their tacit knowledge through art-based actions (e.g., RiverSounds – JoenÄäniä-workshops).

Communicating places

Open discussion for gaining knowledge and strengthening understanding is key for better understanding the Arctic. How do we encourage discussion and promote understanding of the North and the Arctic, and what role can art and design have in this? The chapter observes the role of art and design in opening up discussion about the environment. Examples of applied visual art-based workshop and activities, where the concept of place is centric, are presented. The chapter argues that through focused and open observation, and by creating a better understanding of a place, deeper knowledge and understanding of the Arctic can be formed.

The Arctic Circle crosses Finland in Rovaniemi (66°33'45.9"). Here, the sun stays above the horizon throughout days in the summer, and below the horizon during the winter (Figure 3). What does the Arctic look like from the perspective of applied visual art actions? Places and spaces bear cultural meanings, which together with our background and history, affect the ways we see and interpret them. Place is an important feature in our lives; lived and visited places build a map about the life lived, building up the way we see and look the world. As places change in time, naturally or by the actions of people, we also must adapt to changes. Places and the changes in them, cultures that tell stories of time, and art can have the role both in presenting places and cultures, and also in building and strengthening them (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018). Lippard (1997) argues that in order to achieve a sense of place, extensive visual and historical research is required that includes time spent in the field, contact with oral traditions, and also an intensive knowledge regarding local *multiculturalism* and the wider context of *multicenteredness*. (Lippard, 1997) Art-based actions can provide tools for understanding and supporting changes by the principles of sustainability (Jokela & Huhmarniemi, 2018).

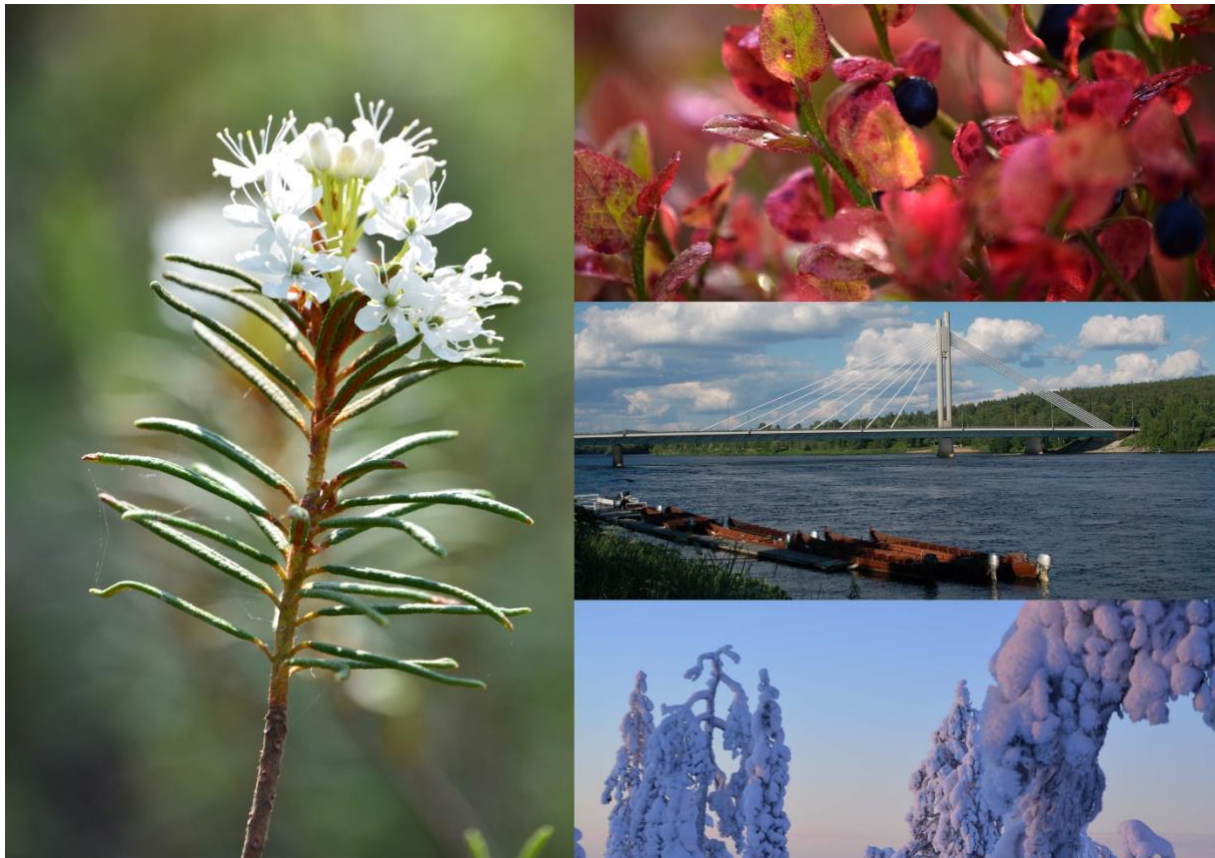


Figure 3. Seasons change the views and colour of the environments. (Katri Konttinen, 2020).

What could be achieved through observation of *place* as a concept that leads towards the creation of better and wider understandings of places and the Arctic's environments? This chapter observes practical examples, where people work with small-scale tasks connected to the environment. Therefore, it asks, what could be the contribution of art and design-based actions in order to achieve a better understanding of places, and the Arctic?

Through lenses – perceiving places around us

We perceive places with different personal prejudices and perceptions. Nowadays, we have all the information in our hands, as the world is open via the internet and various online tools. This raises the question of how much do we actually form our perceptions based on the information available online, and how open are we to observe new places beyond the 'googled' information? The COVID-19 pandemic restricted the mobility of people and affected our lives in many ways, and will most likely continue to do so for some time. It has highlighted the tools we have in our hands for travelling and experiencing places as well as meeting other people through online services.

This chapter observes the phenomenon of place through art and design-based activities. In encounters and meetings between people and places, knowledge can be shared and new knowledge can be created through collaboration and dialogue. Observations and discussions can also change our perceptions through places, and open our eyes to the unique features that places and environments, such as the Arctic, hold. We can observe how the view through our lenses has changed (Figure 4).

The first workshop activities presented in the chapter were implemented by the theme “RiverSounds – JoenÄäniä,” inspired by the great northern rivers. Activities were designed as the first actions within the newly launched thematic network *Arctic Sustainable Art and Design*, coordinated by the University of Lapland. The latter presented activities took place in southern Finland, as part of multidisciplinary project SEEYouth and in Ayr, Scotland. These examples present actions with different participants and settings, but are combined by utilizing a place-specific approach. In these actions, place-specific design as well as environmental and community arts (specifically socially engaged in some cases) are intertwined.



Figure 4. What do we see through our lenses? Test through a glass loupe (Katri Konttinen, 2021).

Environmental and community art in place encountering

We encounter and experience environments and places differently. The creation of experience is always dependent, according to Jokela & Hiltunen (2009), on our community and culture. In other words, our background. The experiences form as perceived and personally meaningful emotional content, as social and functional, and as cultural meanings (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2009: 119). “Art that combines the environmental and communal acts as a kind of phenomenological analysis: it aims at clarifying the structure of the human life-world and understanding it from the ethical, aesthetical and social standpoints” (Jokela & Hiltunen, 2009: 119).

Environmental art can be seen as a method for communication through and about environments. Change and the nature of temporariness are common factors in the fields of environmental and

community art (Sederholm, 2000). The change can be slow or fast, physical or dialogue-based, communicating about the community and the environment.

Timo Jokela connects environmental and place-specific art to applied visual arts:

“Place-specific applied art has been designed for a specific location based on the identified need and terms. It communicates with place-related experiences and memories rather than with the terms of the physical space” (Jokela, 2013: 14).

Community art, at its best, creates dialogue and collaboration between the artist and the local community (Kwon, 2002). It can be an empowering tool for helping people to express their thoughts and concerns on local issues, such as the environment. It can also be empowering and educating for younger generations about the community and environments.

Working with communities, the time following art and design-based activities, often related to specific projects, should be considered. As a project ends the process begins, and this needs to be thought through carefully when working with different groups and communities. According to Dawes (2008), the focus should be more on the growth of people within a certain culture, instead of focusing on the item of culture constructed by people. As the process is carried out beyond projects, empowerment does not only become an indicator of short-term success, but creates the foundations for building and extending future success (Dawes, 2008: 74-76).

Production of (social) place – from space to place

It can be stated that people create places. People all over the world are engaging in place-making activities where space becomes a place (Cresswell, 2004). By giving spaces meaning, arising from experiences and memories, we create social places. The creation of place can happen for a short period of time, a shared moment or experience in a moment in a certain place. From another social aspect, environmental and community arts provide excellent tools for art and design-based activities.

Place can be seen as an object (seen, visited) and also as a way of looking (Cresswell, 2004), whereas space has more abstract sound to it. People from different cultures have a different sense of place and different needs for personal space (see e.g. Tuan, 2011 [1977]). Place can be seen as a cellular, ever changing network of social relations (Massey, 2008) and can be understood as part of a process, where social action organizes itself in space and in time.

Time and technology have changed the concept of place, as it is possible to travel places online without actually visiting them. We can connect to people on the other side of the world in real time. This has made the world literally smaller and easily accessible. It has reshaped our ideas about places and the world. During the COVID-19 pandemic, distance working and schooling occurred as many schools closed their doors and offices recommended employees to work from home. This led us to a new situation, where the concept of place was limited by the terms of the virus.

Site-specific art: RiverSounds – JoenÄäniä

The first case example, RiverSounds – JoenÄäniä (Konttinen & Waara, 2012; Waara & Konttinen, 2013) was a context sensitive concept of art and design-based activity that took place in Northern Finland. The concept was originally developed by master's students Sofia Waara and Katri Konttinen through a project as part of collaboration within the UArctic Network (University of

the Arctic) in 2012. Activities executed within the project formed the first actions under the newly launched thematic network *Arctic Sustainable Arts & Design*¹ coordinated by the University of Lapland.

The actions brought together international participants from various fields of art and design and backgrounds, working together with local communities in Rovaniemi and Ii, northern Finland, during a two-week long Arctic Circles Art & Design Summer School. The summer school focused on exploring the intriguing challenges that Arctic climate, culture and location pose for art and design under themes of Service Design, Sustainable Design and Applied Arts. (WDC2012 Helsinki-Rovaniemi) In RiverSounds we aimed to broaden the knowledge of nature and environments, focusing on site-specific art and design, research and investigations of the river's specific qualities made in the context of place.

RiverSounds could be described as art and design-based dialogue, providing and sharing knowledge on different methods of art and design, as well as working with methods, skills, and materials common to the region. It reached out to define the absolute values of the North by observing, sensing and re-constructing existing ideals and visual culture. Through art and design-based tasks, RiverSounds brought together people to share ideas, thoughts and perspectives. Communication and dialogue extended over people and nature, creating unique and memorable encounters. The process was about learning through practice, focusing on participants' activity and purpose-oriented work with art-based activities as the main tool for knowledge creation and sharing. The soundscape of the river was observed through methods of art and design, utilising environmental art, applying the methods from community art in the process and finding ways of communication through making art (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Working with RiverSounds in Ii (Anna-Mari Nukarinen, 2012).

Fostering the communication and collaboration between local people in Ii and the summer school participants was important. Groups worked creating instruments related to their environments, some more abstract than others: instruments played by the wind and instruments requiring humans to play them. All instruments were planned in order to create soundscapes connected to the river. As a final result of the workshop, an Art Trail was created, leading people to the Environmental Art Park of Ii, as an opening ceremony for the annual Art Ii Biennale. The performative walk was based on a story of log floating spirit written by a local young participant.

RiverSounds was the result of a long design process where different theoretical tools from community art, environmental art education and sustainable design, were used. It aimed to develop the concept of international workshops in the field of sustainable arts and design as well as to create new connections between contemporary art and traditional visual cultures of the Arctic region (Konttinen, 2013). Bringing together people from different backgrounds and local communities, RiverSounds resulted in art works and performances, and visual narratives about the place (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Performance *Log Floating Spirit* in Ii (Glen Coutts, 2012).

Path of senses and piece of the place – workshop activities with the youth in SEEYouth² / Espoo

Path of senses was a practice used in workshops designed for a group of youth with asylum-seeking backgrounds in southern Finland in summer 2020. Methods from environmental and socially engaged arts were intertwined in actions through a social science lens in the workshops (Figure 7). Themes related to youths' personal lives, such as the future, challenges, inspiration and experiences were approached via methods from arts and social sciences, combined with the expertise and long-

term relationship between the youth and the advisor on integration of young people with refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds.

Art-based dialogue created the space for interaction and mutual learning between the youth and the facilitators (Mikkonen & Konttinen, forthcoming). The active role of the youth as experts by experience and through active participation was highlighted in the process of knowledge production. The concept of place and space was in the core of actions and in the everyday lives of the youth, finding their place in the society.



Figure 7. Workshop activities combined different methods and approaches (Katri Konttinen & Mikko Ylisuvanto 2020).

By utilizing multisensory approaches in place related exercises, the awareness of place-specific features can be strengthened, leading towards a stronger connection to a place and a sense of the place. Utilising a task *Piece of the place*,³ where the aim was to find inspiring elements, resulted in discussions about the importance of nature, where especially the role of water as being the source of all life was highlighted (Figure 8).

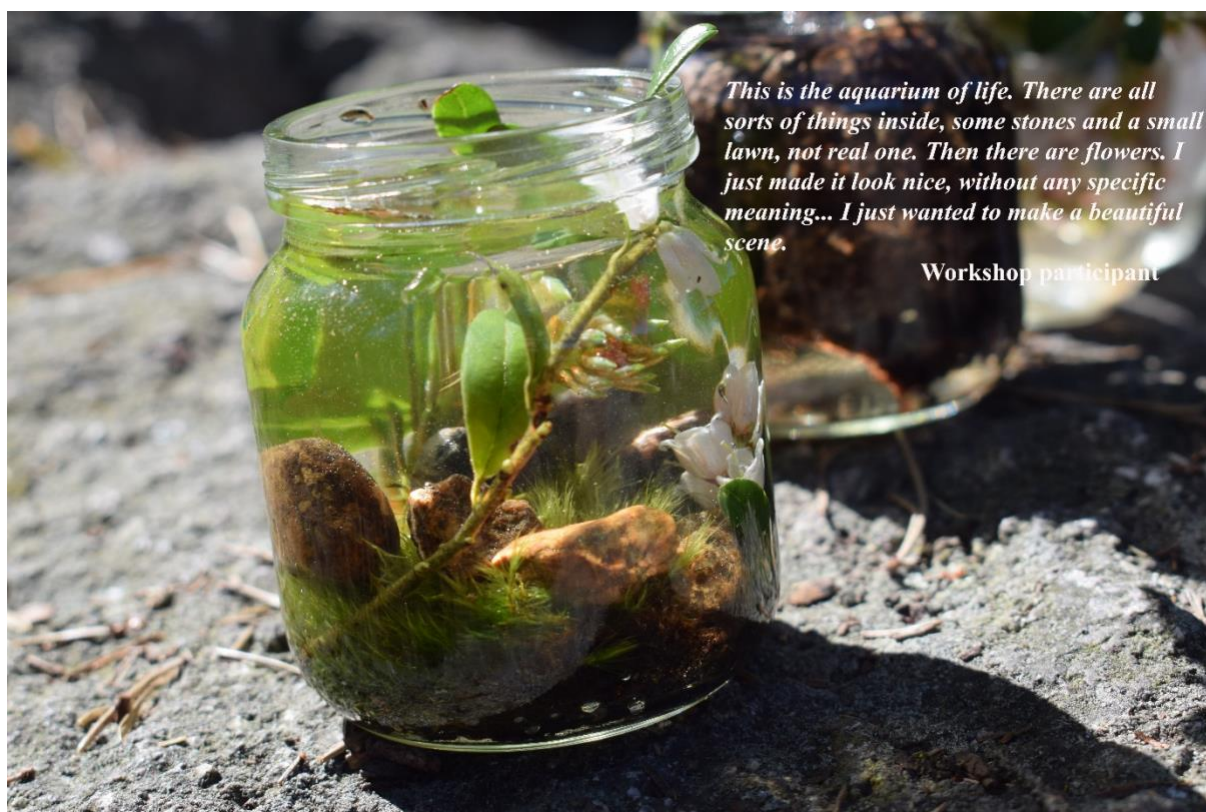


Figure 8. Water as the source of all life with participant thoughts. Katri Konttinen 2020.

The task supported other workshop activities, where we worked with themes related to the youth's lives, such as *belonging to a place* and *identity building* when living in between two countries. Finding attachments to places was discussed through grounding, by being in and sensing the environments, and how important the process is for the youth as they are working towards their future lives. Creating a connection, the nature was discussed as a way for strengthening self-knowledge, and therefore self-esteem, leading towards a sense of belonging to a place. Although, in these activities, the focus was targeted to a certain group with certain themes and aims, the open approach utilized can also be a key factor when discussing the Arctic and how people interpret and find connection to it.

Sense Map / Kemi

Alongside the multisensory approach, the concept of *mapping* has been at the core of art and design-based actions. We engage in building our personal maps as we experience things in places. These maps form around personal experiences and emotions related to experiences as we explore and analyse places through our perspectives (Aura, Horelli & Korpela, 1997).

Sense Map was a short-term workshop taking place in and outside a gallery space in Kemi, North Finland. Here, the aim was to encourage participants to observe their own living environments through art-based methods. The workshop took place at Kemi Art Museum in November 2013 during the final exhibition of the Applied Visual Art-master's degree program: Applied Visual Art and Us (AVA&US) (Figure 9). Master's students Salla-Mari Koistinen, Sofia Waara and the author acted as facilitators in the workshop.



Figure 9. AVA&US presented the progress and outcomes of the piloting master's degree programme of applied visual arts at the Kemi Art museum. Katri Kontinen 2013.

The workshop began with presentations and discussion about the exhibited works of Sofia Waara and Katri Kontinen. Works were presented as sources of inspiration and demonstrating different visual tools for mapping places and observing the surrounding environments. Following the discussion, the group created a colour map. This was practice aimed at supporting group formation through working and discussions, and opening the usage of colours in expressing emotions and moods (Figure 10.) The colour map was utilized later in place mapping.



Figure 10. Colour codes created by the group. (Katri Kontinen, 2013).

From the museum the group headed out to observe the near-by surrounding environments. Participants drew a map of their route that formed their own sense maps of Kemi by using the

colours from the colour map. They collected materials, such as stones, leaves or photographs, to support observations on environments that aroused emotions or were somehow meaningful to them. At the end, the group gathered at the museum, where the findings were coded by colours and gathered together with the participants' maps as installations to the space and were documented (Figure 11.). The documentation was posted on Facebook, Twitter and a blog as part of an installation “w/, with, kanssa” by Salla-Mari Koistinen.



Figure 11. Details from the installation. Katri Konttinen 2013.

In the Sense Map, personal mapping was at the core. It was a personal process, where the participants shared their maps in a dialogue. Maps tell stories of places and people living there. As Lippard (1997) writes, the maps have their unintentional subjectivity and for that reason they have been important to the cultural landscape construction. Maps are composites of places and they hide as much as they reveal (Lippard, 1997: 82). The map maker can choose what to include in their personal map and what to highlight; through dialogue this can lead to new findings for the other participants.

Mapping and the creation of maps, as a form of personal observations, could be utilized more in multidisciplinary research about the Arctic as a social place. What would the map drawn, for example, of Rovaniemi by a visitor look like and how would it differ from a map made by someone living in Rovaniemi? It could result in interesting outcomes as people living and visiting the Arctic discuss their findings in shared dialogues.

Tuan (2011) described experience as a combination of *feeling* and *thought* (Tuan, 2011 [1977]). It is interesting to think how one communicates about experiences and if visual tools would help in narrating the experiences. As places carry different narratives in them, they carry narratives of people living there. Lippard (1997) argues that “place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map

of a person's life". It is defined by the people and the culture lived in that place. The place carries connections and information about what surrounds it, what has formed it, and what has and will happen there (Lippard, 1997).

Personal place-specific adventure: Backpack adventures in Scotland

This small-scale sound-mapping project taking place in Ayr (Scotland) was done in order to form a sense of place by mapping sounds on a walking route. Sounds were recorded from chosen sound spots, and were supported by photographs (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Meaningful place, also one of the sound spots in Ayr. Double image, Katri Konttinen 2013.

We are surrounded by sounds and soundscapes. Sounds enlarge our spatial awareness to include areas out of our sight and dramatize spatial experiences, as our formation of space is mostly dominated by our sight (Tuan, 2011). Here, the sounds were united with photographs and written manuscript of the walk. The mapping process formed a visual narrative from a walk along the river. According to Pink (2007) photography has long been an important part of ethnographers' 'tool kit' (Pink, 2007). Finally, I created a video from the different samples gathered from this personal sound-mapping journey (Figure 13). Photography enables a viewer to focus their attention on a specific subject/object. What is left outside the frames can be imagined. Photographs can have deeper meaning by the subjective gaze of the viewer, and that each viewer can produce these meanings by relating the image to their own *experiences, knowledge and wider cultural discourses* (Pink, 2007: 82).

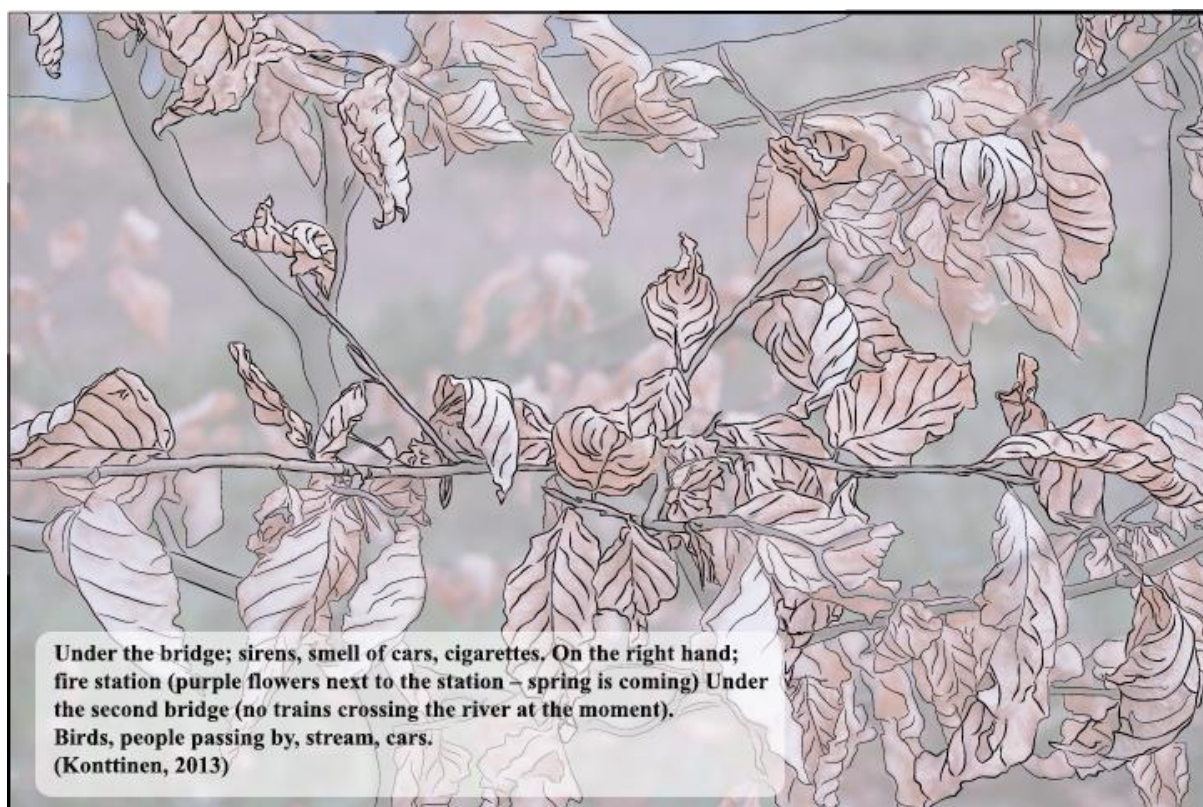


Figure 13. Illustration from the Sound Mapping Journey with written notes. Katri Kontinen 2013.

Through applied visual art lens – Dialogue on places through visual methods

Geographer Denis Cosgrove argues that those for whom land is the fabric of their lives, for whom it is livelihood and home environment, do not see that land as landscape. They relate to the land as ‘insiders’ (Andrews, 1999: 20). This article argues, however, that art and design-based methods can foster new perspectives for us to observe the familiar surroundings, and can therefore be looked as part of personal mapping process, reframing the map. This was seen in cases where the participants engaged in art and design-based activities in their home environments in Kemi and in Ii.

All the presented case examples share in common a strong connection and commitment to *places* and *spaces* through art and design-based activities. As meetings and encounters occurred, they provided space for mutual learning (Mikkonen & Kontinen, forthcoming), leading towards knowledge production on places as the participants’ shared their discoveries. In these shared dialogues, different aspects were highlighted. As the youth in Espoo described water as a source of life, rivers were looked at through the livelihood they provided, and seen also as a source of inspiration for soundscapes in RiverSounds. Through the shared dialogue, a deeper understanding can be achieved with creation of new knowledge, which is based on ethnographic and intuitive, tacit observations. Art and design-based methods can provide insights for people from different disciplines by using, for example, a multisensory approach in actions.

Multisensory approaches and personal mapping can be identified as the frames in the presented cases, which all aimed to facilitate and encourage meetings, and therefore strengthen the dialogue

between people and places. This dialogue can play a key role in changing our perception. In RiverSounds, for example, we sought to facilitate meetings between the local community, international participants and environmental art and design (Konttinen & Waara, 2012).



Figure 14. How does the Arctic look through your lens? Experiences with glass loupes, Katri Konttinen 2021.

As this article focused on observing *how art and design-based actions with place-specific approach could contribute to the discussion of increasing awareness and knowledge on the Arctic*, it approached the phenomenon of place through examples, where small-scale tasks were utilised. These tasks and the dialogues that followed, show that art and design-based activities can foster encounters between people and places, and can awake us to observe our perceptions of places and challenge us to ask, how come we see places differently and why (Figure 14). By challenging our perceptions, we can find new ways to approach places, like the Arctic.

Though the knowledge born from art and design-based activities is often tacit and subjective from one's experiences, it can be said that the creative approach can widen the view in our lenses, as the methods encourage us to approach place as an intriguing concept. Through practical work, forms of dialogue can be formed between people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, connecting them to a shared dialogue about places, such as the Arctic.

Notes

1. The network aims on *identifying and sharing contemporary and innovative practices in teaching, learning and knowledge exchange in the fields of art, design and visual culture education*. It aims on promoting cooperation and collaboration between universities, institutions and communities, focusing on Northern, Arctic issues in the field of arts, design and visual

culture.

2. SEEYouth: Social Innovation through Participatory Art and Design with Youth at the Margins: Solutions for Engaging and Empowering Youth with Trans-Atlantic Mirroring' – project, funded by Trans-Atlantic Platform for the Social Sciences and Humanities (TAP)/Academy of Finland (decision n:o 334786, PI Satu Miettinen), funding period 2020–2021, University of Lapland
3. Piece of the place, was originally created for RiverSounds – JoenÄäniä workshops, located in Rovaniemi. The task was to collect 'pieces' from the environments, which were thought to have connection or described somehow to the place. The task aimed on observing the place.

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